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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [MX](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#)  
SUBJECT: TEACHERS' STRIKE RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT VOTING IN  
OAXACA

REF: A. 05 MEXICO 2700

[1](#)B. MEXICO 3309

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR WILLIAM DUNCAN, REAS  
ONS: 1.4(B/D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As Election Day draws near, public school teachers in the state of Oaxaca remain on strike, with some continuing to threaten to block voting unless a resolution is reached by July 1. What began some five weeks ago apparently as a routine labor action in pursuit of increased wages has evolved -- in part due to the mishandling of the situation by Oaxaca Governor's Ulises Ruiz -- into a broader protest movement that more radical groups may be exploiting. The Oaxaca teachers have occupied the city's central plaza as well as certain public buildings; they also have organized several mass marches, the fourth of which is planned for June [1](#)28. In a search for a resolution of the crisis, union officials and Secretariat of Government (SEGOB) representatives have begun negotiations with the participation of a civil society mediation commission. The GOM appears to be working hard to reduce tensions in advance of the elections, and to the extent that those efforts remain on track we believe the teachers' will seek to avoid raising the stakes by interfering directly with the conduct of the elections. Nevertheless, the situation remains volatile. End summary.

From Strike to Social Movement

[1](#)2. (SBU) Oaxaca's 70,000 teachers-- members of a dissident faction of the national teachers' union (SNTE) -- began their work stoppage five weeks ago in pursuit of higher wages. According to embassy contacts, Oaxaca Governor Ulises Ruiz (PRI), a close ally of PRI presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo, initially neglected to seriously address the teachers' demands, arguing that the state lacked the funds to meet them. He accused SNTE national leader Elba Esther Gordillo, Madrazo's bitter political rival (ref a) of fomenting the crisis.

[1](#)3. (U) The situation took a dramatic turn for the worse in the early morning hours of June 14, when Governor Ruiz ordered security forces -- including some firing tear gas from helicopters -- to dislodge the protesters from the city center. With teachers resisting the effort, up to ninety persons on both sides were wounded. Although the teachers' were briefly expelled from the city center, they soon returned. In a show of solidarity against the Governor's heavy-handed action, a number of civil society groups have joined the teachers, who now demand Governor Ruiz's resignation as an additional condition for ending their strike. Protesters intermittently have blocked highways into Oaxaca as well as access to the airport, in addition to key

public buildings, including the local office of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE).

¶4. (U) Raising the stakes, the union threatened to disrupt the July 2 presidential election in Oaxaca. Although some union members subsequently soft-pedaled this threat, union leader Enrique Rueda Pacheco recently refused to rule out such a measure. In any case, union members have decided to remove notices posted in public schools giving the addresses of voting stations and have threatened to prevent any voting stations from being installed in buildings they control, including public schools. Local election officials are seeking to relocate voting stations, and according to press reports IFE plans to send senior officials to Oaxaca to monitor the voting.

¶5. (U) In an attempt to defuse the situation, the Fox Administration dispatched a senior SEGOB official to Oaxaca to negotiate with the teachers. At the insistence of the teachers, a four member, civil society commission has been established to mediate the negotiations. The commission includes the Archbishop of Oaxaca, Jose Luis Chavez; Bishop Emeritus Arturo Lona Reyes; the Coordinator of the church's Commission for Justice and Peace, Wilfrido Mayen Pelaez; and renowned Oaxacan artist Francisco Toledo.

#### Oaxaca Behind the Scenes

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¶6. (C) In order to better understand the dynamics underlying the strike, poloffs met with several contacts with firsthand knowledge of the situation. Diodoro Carrasco, former PRI Governor of Oaxaca and Secretary of Government in the Zedillo Administration -- and a recent defector to the PAN -- told poloffs on June 13 that the Oaxaca section of the SNTE has a

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long history of labor unrest and confrontation, even if this year's strike was more conflictive than past ones. He believes that other, more radical elements, including indigenous and migrant movements, were seeking to exploit the current situation, increasing the level of confrontation. Just four days before the June 14 clash, Carrasco predicted that the situation was "one step from violence." He blamed Governor Ruiz for handling the conflict in a confrontational manner and being unwilling to negotiate in good faith. He disputed Ruiz's claim that Gordillo was somehow fomenting the unrest in order to prejudice Madrazo's campaign, noting that she had no influence on the Oaxaca union.

¶7. (C) Heladio Ramirez, head of the PRI-affiliated National Farmers' Confederation and himself a former Governor of Oaxaca, echoed Carrasco's criticism of Ruiz's handling of the crisis, saying that a negotiated resolution at one point had been attainable. He argued that even if the state currently lacked resources to offer an immediate pay raise, it could have shown its good faith by guaranteeing a future raise.

¶8. (C) By contrast, Enrique Burgos, a PRI congressman and president of the lower chamber's Labor Commission, appeared to side with Ruiz, describing the events in Oaxaca as politically motivated. In particular, he believes that Gordillo has somehow provoked the labor unrest. According to this logic, by blocking the elections in Oaxaca -- or at the very least, by discouraging voters from turning out -- the strikers would drive down Madrazo's vote totals, as well as those of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who is in second place in Oaxaca. By reducing the vote for Calderon's two rivals in a state in which the PAN has little presence, Gordillo would be indirectly aiding Calderon.

¶9. (C) In a June 27 meeting, Gabriel Sanchez of the NGO Citizen Presence (Presencia Ciudadana) downplayed the potential impact that the strike could have on the election in Oaxaca, even if the teachers did choose to block voting stations. He noted that the teachers' presence is limited

largely to the center of Oaxaca city, and they are therefore capable of affecting only a very small percentage of the total number of voting stations in Oaxaca state. An IFE official told us he doubted the teachers could disrupt more than perhaps 20 percent of the polling stations at the worst (ref b).

¶10. (C) Comment: We find Burgos's speculation that Elba Esther Gordillo is somehow behind the conflict as self-serving and improbable, given her lack of influence on the local union. Nevertheless, the teachers' appear motivated to cause the PRI electoral damage. Their threat to block the election in Oaxaca is a high stakes strategy that risks alienating the support of the general population; that may well account for apparent desire of some union members to back off from this threat. The level of tension in Oaxaca -- although still high -- appears to have decreased slightly over the past few days and our best guess is that the union will seek to avoid an Election Day clash. Nevertheless, the situation bears close monitoring and post will have two election observers on the ground in Oaxaca for that purpose. End comment.

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